

PLAKUN TRAVA

The Doukhobors



KOOZMA J. TARASOFF

Plakun Trava-The Doukhobors

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Chapter IV

PROTEST

Night came quickly as horses transporting wagons and 7000 people converged on three plateaus in Transcaucasia. One was in the Wet Mountains near the village of Orlovka; another one in Elizavetpol near the Verigin Family settlement of Slavanka, and the third in Kars near the village of Spasovka. It was the eve of June 29th, 1895, the day of St. Peter and Paul, one of the few holidays when Doukhobors got together to renew their social roots. A year earlier Tsar Alexander III had died and his politically-weak and narrow-minded son Nicholas II (1894-1917), as the last of the Romanov rulers, had come to the throne.

In autocratic style, Nicholas demanded the oath of allegiance from all of his subjects. But under their leader's guidance, the Doukhobors rejected the oath as well as the requirement of able-bodied men to serve in the army. Compulsory military service had been in effect since 1887 and earlier, on Easter Day of the momentous year of 1895, those of the young Doukhobor men who had been in military service, had tested this law. Led by Matvey Lebedev, they had refused to continue serving, and had immediately encountered harsh persecution in the disciplinary battalion.

Now, on this traditional holiday, thousands of simple Doukhobor peasants in the Caucasus were preparing to give a dramatic sign of support to their brethren, and at the same time to publicly protest this violent military habit of men, once and for all time. No one had done this before in such a public demonstration. It was a grandiose scheme of protest and persuasion by a minority amidst a vast majority. The proverbial nonviolent doves were getting ready to burn their firearms as the predatory hawks waited on the sidelines to pounce on them.

The wagons contained muzzle loading rifles, fancy handguns, silver sabres, and daggers, all lethal weapons that Doukhobors had collected over the years (mostly for hunting, but also for protection from the fierce mountain tribes). All were collected in secret so that the authorities would not prematurely know what was about to take place. Information was also kept from members of the Small Party, who had just won a court battle for the Orphan's Home. The wagons contained many drums of

kerosene, firewood, and sun-dried manure bricks (since wood was not readily available in the Wet Mountain area). At the appointed site, the wagons were unloaded and the weapons were placed in teepee style with the gun muzzles pointing up.

Each site had 15 to 20 wagon loads of weapons, which formed a huge pile around which members of the Large Party stood waiting for the historic signal from a respected elder. In Kars, the people gathered on a treeless grass-covered plateau, a chosen picnic ground for the Peter's Day festivities. In Elizavetpol, 150 miles to the northeast, the location was a well-cared for, park-like meadow surrounded with fruit trees, a place where the people also met annually for Peter and Paul Day. And 150 miles to the west of Elizavetpol, in the Wet Mountains, it was a flat, treeless rocky site below which was a narrow valley with the *Peshcheri* caves where Lukeria Kalmykova and Peter V. Verigin used to spend many hours talking about the Doukhobor movement.

Sharp at midnight, the kerosene-soaked piles were lit and flames leapt up forming a huge bonfire which could be seen for miles around. As it was considered a bad omen to unload the rifles, many salvos burst forth, as if heralding the victory of a battle. Except it was not a conventional battle with soldiers, but an Isaiah-type battle to convert weapons into plows so that men would learn war no more.

The mournful and sobbing sounds of the Doukhobor psalms gradually drew in all the voices with men on one side and women on the other. Their motifs absorbed all sweetness and sorrow, all hopes and fascination of the life in a collective striving for a better future. With the crackling of the fire, and the periodic volley of gunpowder, these sounds made a tremendous impression on one's psyche; they diverted one's attention from every-day cares and hypnotically drew one into the world of the past and future. Their selections were part of their oral tradition in their Book of Life. For them, time and space had been brought together into one. The past was only to be used as it affected the present – and here they realized that the time of trouble was upon them. But courageously and contentedly they sang and sang all through the night.

Armenians, Georgians, Turks and others came out to see what terror was taking place. They saw the flames, a large *sobranie*, and on inquiring learned that the weapons were being burned. Some hill people said: "Maybe sheep stealing will be easier now."

Nicholas's officers were especially interested. They had been forewarned by the Gubanovs, the Zubkovs and the Kotelnikovs of the Small Party with rumours that the Large Party was gathering guns to attack them and take over the Orphan's Home. The rumours proved wrong and another set of lies were placed before the officers: "Seeing that they were outnumbered, the Large Party decided to burn their guns."

At the village of Spasovka in the province of Kars, the arms burnings went by without incident. At dawn the police came and took some molten metal as evidence. The Doukhobors were so disappointed with the anticlimax that the young men went to one of the local district officers, a Tartar by the name of Birakov, and handed him their military reserve papers. Birakov, who understood the Doukhobors, did not get upset. Calmly he accepted them, took down the names of the men and said:

... You go home. I shall send your tickets to the higher authorities; they decide, that's the way it will be. It is not in my power to judge you or punish you for such a noble act. If you sincerely believe this, then *Slava Bogu*, God be praised.²

A few days later, however, the authorities began to take action with arrests and jailings for breaking the conscription law.

The burning of guns in Slavanka, province of Elizavetpol, produced more excitement. Authorities tried to stop the men and women walking to the fire site, but they would not listen and continued on their way. Three Doukhobors were arrested as a warning to others. At the site, Colonel Seratov's Cossacks tried to pull some of the guns out, but too late – the temperature was too high to

allow them to get near. This angered the Colonel and he ordered the protesters to be whiplashed. Then the young men came up and handed in their reserve papers which annoyed the district attorney Strelkov so much that he personally went about slashing everyone with his fists. Eighty Doukhobors were arrested and escorted to the Elizavetpol prison.

At the Wet Mountains site near Orlovka the mood was unusually tense. Verigin's Large Party followers were more militant for this was the stronghold of the Small Party. Moreover, the authorities were more numerous and anticipated trouble. Governor Nakashidze and an army of 200 Cossacks were in Gorelovka, waiting to intervene should the Large Party attack the Orphan's Home. As no trouble developed during the night, the Governor decided to call together all heads of the Doukhobor households for a meeting in the administrative centre of Bogdanovka, and early the following morning a few Cossacks were sent out to transmit the messages. They found the villages deserted as the inhabitants were still at the fire scene holding a *sobranie*; here the Cossacks found more than 2000 of them chanting psalms around the smoking embers and the molten metal remains of the guns. The sergeant in charge delivered the Governor's message. The Doukhobors replied:

We are now praying, and before our prayer is finished, no one will go. But if the Governor wants to see us, let him come to us. There are thousands of us, and only one of him.³

Nakashidze sent another messenger. This time the Doukhobors replied in a more compromising manner:

We are now completing our service, and after this we shall go to the Governor.⁴

Such disobedience was too much for the Governor. He commanded Captain Praga and 200 Cossacks to bring everyone to Bogdanovka "with whips if necessary".

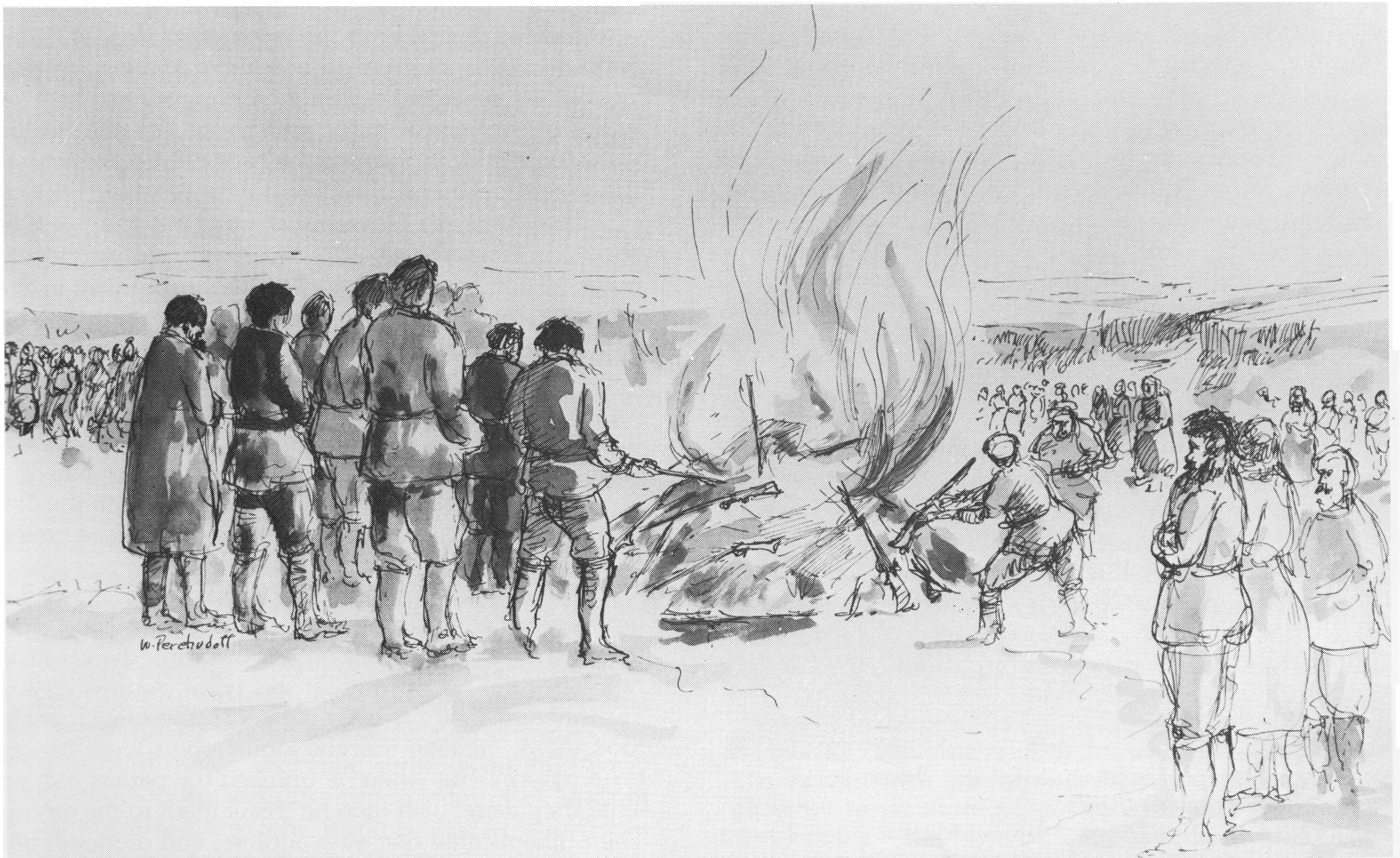
When the platoon came within 500 feet, it stopped and gave the horses a brief rest. Doukhobors saw that an attack was imminent, closed their ranks and waited for the onslaught.

With the sound of bugle and Praga's cry of "Oorah", the Cossacks sped with full gallop, shouting and screaming on to the defenceless mass of Russian pacifists. The Cossack *pletie* (horse whips) slashed everyone without discrimination of age or sex. Each strike cut through the flesh. Hats were knocked off. Faces were swollen. Skin and flesh were ripped off. Eyes were filled with blood, surrounded by swollen, blackened flesh. Many were bathed in blood and even the grass became red. When two Cossacks began to wave their lashes in the air, without touching anybody, Captain Praga cried, "You are deceiving the Tsar" and struck one of them in the face with the lash with such force that the blood gushed forth from the man's nose.

Praga the fierce, the antagonist, got angrier and angrier. With the signal, he called two retreats and ordered his men to beat the Doukhobors more fiercely. "Nagaiki", he yelled and the men brought out their military whips, as horses and riders two hundred strong sped onto the battered two thousand. The horses reared at the people, but refused to trample them. The beatings resumed as those at the centre moved out to the edge replacing those who were beaten up.



Visiting the pescheri (grotto) at the site of the 1895 Burning of Firearms in Transcaucasia is author of this book. July 9, 1977.



The historic “Burning of Firearms” in Transcaucasia June 28-29, 1895 is recreated by artist Bill Perehudoff.



On this plateau near the Village of Orlovka, in the Wet Mountains region of Transcaucasia, hundreds of Doukhobors on the eve of June 28-29, 1895 burned their firearms in a public demonstration to the world that the institution of wars and violence should end once and for all.

directions, began to return home.

But the suffering of the Doukhobors in the Wet Mountains was only beginning. Men who had served in the army, like Pozdnyakov, were called up for a month's training in a disciplinary battalion (to join those already there after the Easter protest from the enlisted men), and on their refusal were sentenced to two years in prison and later to 18 years exile. Those who handed in their reserve papers and refused to serve were also imprisoned and many were later sent to Siberia. About 300 in all underwent special punishment, including a number of men from the Elizavetpol and Kars area who had been arrested at the time of the Burning of Arms.

The remaining 4600 Large Party Doukhobors from the Wet Mountains settlements were exiled to five malaria-ridden valleys in the region of Batum, including the districts of Gori, Signak, Tianeti, Dusheti, and Skra, within a radius of 100 miles. Tsarist officials set the rules: one wagon load per family; there was to be no communication with other Doukhobors; no more than five families in each village of strangers; and five households from each village were to leave immediately. Nicholas Zibarov, who left with the first group on July 8th, recalls that their property was sold at give-away prices. Tartars, Armenians, and others, including some of the rich Small Party Doukhobors, were the beneficiaries of all kinds of goods, implements, sleighs, wagons, lumber, sheep and livestock, as well as the houses and grain.

As the July 8th morning came, 52 wagons were hitched to four horses each, as 35 families were ready to move. An armed escort stopped at the edge of the village, as officials gave a final offer of freedom: "Does anyone here wish to reconsider his stand and submit to the government?" The question was posed to each individual. Zibarov replied: "We are willing to pay ordinary taxes, rent for land, but we cannot pay a war tax – for we cannot serve two masters." Others followed suit.

The first party left, passed the crops they had planted in the spring, and then on for many miles of travel to their places of exile. These were some of the poorest areas of the country and the climate was one of the hottest, a sharp contrast to the higher altitude conditions to which they had been accustomed.

In their exiled circumstances, earning a livelihood was extremely difficult, for they were not allowed to have any land, but were forced to find jobs in the Georgian population who, for the most part, were not in the habit of hiring labourers. Moreover they were obliged to pay for their lodgings and meals. Even when they did find a job, their labour was exploited, with the payment generally being exceedingly small. Sickesses caused by want, by sudden change of climate as well as by injuries they suffered as a result of the cossack beatings in the Wet Mountains all had their lethal effect. The death toll became high, and would have been higher if it were not for the help of Kars and Elizavetpol Doukhobors who brought food to them secretly, risking their own punishment. Nevertheless, by the time that the Doukhobors left for Canada three years later, one quarter of the scattered group had died. All for a noble cause: "If there is no soldier, there is no war."



Matvey Vasilevich Lebedev was the first young Doukhobor conscript to lay down his gun on Easter Sunday of 1895, thus earning himself a permanent place of honour in Doukhobor history. Pictured here with his wife Vasilisa Nikolaevna, and three of their six children (l. to r.): Agafia, Maria, and Vasya. c. 1920.

As already mentioned, the Burning of Arms was the end result of a two-step strategy of civil disobedience. On Easter Day, 1895, Matvey Lebedev and 10 other Doukhobors serving in a reserve battalion at Elizavetpol began their rejection of war by refusing to go on church parade. War, they said, was incompatible with Christianity, and Christ had commanded them "Resist not him that is evil." When the men handed back their guns and tore off their shoulder straps, the military authorities were alarmed; such insubordination, they feared, might prove infectious and spread to other soldiers outside the group. They decided, therefore, to make an example of extreme punishment so as to act as a deterrent to would-be slackers from the army. They browbeat the men into submission; placed them in dark underground cells for several days only on bread and water; flogged them with *rozgi* (a bundle of prickly acacia twigs), then thrust rifles in their hands to force them into military drill. Lebedev's colleague, Sherbinin, was beaten in the front and the back and then thrown onto the gymnasium horse – this punishment broke his chest, and he died, refusing to take the gun.

Tsarist officers tried to break the will of the Doukhobors by other macabre methods. Five disobedient Doukhobor soldiers were led into the barracks yard at Akhalkalaki, where they were lined up before a firing squad. They prayed and calmly awaited their death. But the retreat was sounded, the Cossacks lowered their guns, and the Doukhobors were asked to take back the guns. When they refused, the Cossacks pretended to cut them up with swords; still the disobedient conscripts remained

The bloody and brutal morning passed by slowly. Eventually the battered and weary Doukhobors were ordered to walk to Bogdanovka eight miles away. One hundred men were ordered to stay behind and bring the horses and wagons as well as those too weak to walk. The painful trek began. The men led the way, with the women following a few strides behind, and then the wagon train. To soften the pain, the Doukhobors began to sing psalms. Here is one of them:

For the sake of Thee, Lord, I loved the narrow gate; I left the material life; I left father and mother; I left brother and sister; I left my whole race and tribe; I bear hardness and persecution; I bear scorn and slander; I am hungry and thirsty; I am walking naked; For the sake of Thee, Lord.⁵

The Cossacks tried to drown their voices with obscene songs, but the Doukhobors continued in their stubborn way. In their attempt to break this stubbornness, the Cossacks jeered the women, grabbed some of them by the hair and dragged them for several yards. Others grabbed the women's shawls and stuffed them in their pockets. Praga told the Doukhobors that if they had not been stubborn, nothing would have happened. To him elder Nikolai Zibarov replied:

Let's suppose that you attend your church and you are suddenly interrupted by a man who calls for you. Do you suddenly leave the church before finishing your prayers?⁷

"No," replied Praga. "I would not go out; I must finish what I came for, fulfil what I began." Then he hesitated and qualified his statement: "Of course, it depends who calls; perhaps some *muzhik*, then why should I go? But if a colonel, governor or a minister calls, then I must go at once, drop everything."

It is different with the Doukhobors, pointed out Zibarov:

For us, all people are equal, the governor is the same, even the simple *muzhik* – all are equal. The only difference is that one puts on himself different and extra clothes and ornaments, like silver and gold buttons. But when the uniform is taken off and put on the simple *muzhik*, the *muzhik* is just as fearful as the other one.⁸

Whether they knew it or not, the Doukhobors were now no longer acting as a sectarian religious group. They had transformed themselves into a social movement. They spoke and sang of equality, of peace, and brotherhood. After the morally lax period of the Kalmykovs, they had now dropped their isolation and moved into the world arena. Theirs was a universal striving for a world without guns, a world of peace, a world utopia where the kingdom of God is to be created here on earth. These were the passions that dwelt in these people as they trekked to the village of Bogdanovka.

One mile from the village, Governor Nakashidze was catching up to the procession on his way from Gorelovka to Bogdanovka. Captain Praga noticed his approach and ordered a halt and the removal of caps.

To a class society, the Doukhobor reply was rude: "When the Governor comes and greets us, then we will greet him too, as brothers, in the regular manner."

Praga lost his head, ordered another charge and trampled one elder to death. Cossack whips lashed heavily at the heads of men, trying to knock off their caps. One

man had an eye torn out of its socket. When the Governor approached, he ordered the beatings to stop. But when Nakashidze learned of the insubordination of these people, he became very angry and personally beat several Doukhobors with his truncheon. But the beatings were ineffective in keeping the caps off; no sooner were the caps knocked off, the Doukhobors put them back on.

Disgusted, the Governor climbed into his coach and shouted: "I shall deal differently with you in Bogdanovka." Then left. When the Doukhobors arrived in Bogdanovka, the authorities were already recording names of all those present, including the bystanders who were some of the Gorelovka people.

"How do you do?" asked the Governor to the Doukhobors.

"As you see us," they replied.

"Now will you obey and give allegiance to the Tsar, as all good people here?" Governor Nakashidze pointed to the Small Party members of Gorelovka.

The Doukhobors asked for clarification: "If the government orders will not be opposed to our conscience, then we can obey; but if on the contrary, then we cannot." Several young men at this point stepped forward and handed their reservist papers to the Governor. He took them, thinking that the Doukhobors were begging for a pardon. But when he unrolled the papers and saw what they were, with rage he threw them to the ground. Then others came one after another, and dropped more papers at his feet. This caused the Governor to fly into a violent rage; hysterically, he ordered the alarm. The Cossacks unsheathed their rifles and trained them at the Doukhobors, waiting for the order to shoot.

At this fateful moment, Prince Ospinsky, who had recently come to Bogdanovka from St. Petersburg, intervened dramatically. Hearing the bugle and seeing that the Governor had lost his cool, the Prince unsheathed his sabre and holding it over the head of the Governor cried: "*Nyet* there is no law to shoot these innocent people. If you give the order to shoot, I shall cleave your head in two."

The Cossacks were ordered to put their guns away, come off their horses and beat the people with whips, after which the Governor ordered Captain Praga to escort the Doukhobors back to their villages and to take charge of the villages, especially Bogdanovka. "You may do what you think necessary to make these people obey."

Execution of this order began that night and continued for several days. Praga and his Cossacks were billeted among the Doukhobors as in a conquered country. Vasya Pozdnyakov recalls:

... they were riding about the villages plundering everywhere and beating everybody who fell into their hands. In one night, by permission of their commander, they violated several women, among whom was a girl of sixteen.⁹

Pozdnyakov, who himself was a conscript, was picked up by the Cossacks for special punishment as a deterrent to others. He was given 300 lashes with the Cossack's whips, then kept in a corn loft, on bread and water, for 20 days. Finally the Cossacks went away and soldiers of the infantry replaced them, who, according to Pozdnyakov, behaved much better, and the people, who had fled in all



Visiting Peter V. Verigin in exile in the Kola Peninsula of northern Russia, his sister Varyusha and brother Vasili. Beside Peter stands Vasil Obedkov who together with Ivan E. Konkin in 1893 brought the first message from Verigin to the Doukhobors calling on them to return to the ancient traditions of Christian communism of sharing. For this deed, both Konkin and Obedkov were exiled to Yakutsk. c. 1890.

firm in their belief. Finally, they were beaten and returned to their cells. In Kars, Doukhobors were subjected to the same terror by means of the erection of gallows, the victims being dressed in death-cell garments as if they were about to be hanged. Yet, neither threats, nor trickery, persuaded them to accept the gun.

The brave Lebedev who sparked phase one of the disobedience strategy, testified before a court on May 31st, stating that he could not serve two masters:

I will not kill anyone, either during the time of war or during the time of peace, even if I have to face the firing squad. For my belief I am ready to endure all kinds of suffering of the body.¹⁰

Another Doukhobor conscript, Plotnikov, when given 80 strokes of the prickly *rozgi*, said "It would be better for you to beat me to death." And when the gun was thrust in his hands, he said "I will not train with the regiment and I will not shoot." A firm "*nyet*". After serving part of their sentence in the disciplinary battalion, those Doukhobor soldiers who neither died nor submitted were exiled to Yakutsk in Siberia.

Both of these startling antimilitarist steps were not new in spirit. They were based in earlier Doukhobor traditions that repudiated the state and church which

sanctioned armed violence, along with the violence itself. During the Turkish War of 1769-84, Doukhobor conscripts deliberately flung away their arms during battle; and in 1807-09, Doukhobors of the Kiev garrison regiment refused to receive ammunition or perform military service, and in consequence were sent as convicts to the Nertchinsk mines in Siberia.¹¹ But what was new now was the availability of a leader who stimulated a revival and, while in exile, masterfully guided the implementation of mass demonstration against weapons in the three plateaus of the Caucasus. The leader was Peter V. Verigin, who at his proclamation as leader in January 1887 had been arrested by administrative order and jailed. Soon he was sent to Shenkursk in northern Archangel, then to Kola further north, back to Shenkursk, and finally to Siberia, for a total of 16 years of exile, up to his departure for Canada in the fall of 1902.

Life in exile for Verigin was his university. It was here that he was exposed for the first time to many different political, philosophical and anarchistic ideas, by personal contact and through correspondence and readings. By far the greatest influence on Verigin and the Doukhobors was that of Lev Nicholaevich Tolstoy, the literary giant of Russia. Verigin incorporated many of Tolstoy's ideas with his own; he passed these on to his followers, including Tolstoy's ideas of nonresistance, vegetarianism, and the repudiation of government authority, law courts, the oath, and ownership of property. All during his banishment Verigin prompted a marked moral revival by the advice he sent through his messengers Ivan Konkin, Vasily Obedkov, Vasily Vereschagin, Vasily Verigin, and Michael Androsov.

Through epic journeys across the frozen north and thousands of miles into eastern Siberia (part by train, part by boat, part by reindeer), the messengers secretly made their way, some narrowly escaping being caught, while others were arrested just as they were about to reach their destination. One of these, Androsov, was permitted to see Verigin only long enough to dine with him. Verigin questioned the messenger, then quickly exchanged boots with him before the police arrived to escort Androsov on his return journey by reindeer-sleigh. Verigin's boots contained the message to the Doukhobors which was then spread among the followers as soon as the messenger returned to the Caucasus.

Verigin's exposure to Tolstoyism, which began in 1893, coincided with his directives to the Large Party followers. The first directive was brought from Shenkursk in the autumn of 1893. It called on his followers to return to the early Doukhobor tradition of Christian communism: to forgive debts within the community and pay off their debts with outsiders, and then to redistribute their property so that all would achieve equality. Most of his followers responded positively. Vasya Pozdnyakov and the village of Bogdanovka, carried out a thorough communalization, cancelling debts, redistributing property, developing common blacksmith and carpenters' shops, dividing up the land so that everything was worked in common, and even helping the poorer Armenian and Tartar neighbours with gifts of clothing, cattle and money.¹² Their lives were becoming happier and easier. Several villages redistributed some of their wealth with



The "Burning of Arms" by the Doukhobors in Russia on June 29th 1895 involved many leading people in each of the three areas of their settlement in the Caucasus. The five dedicated young Doukhobors pictured here were the ones chosen to direct the epoch-making event in the Kars area, generally referred to as the Kara-Khan settlement. Left to right they are - Ivan Ivanovich Planidin, Peter Ivanovich Dorofeev, Grigoriy Vasilevich Verigin, Pavel Vasilevich Planidin and Semeon Efimovich Chernov. They posed for this picture a few days before the Burning of Arms took place, anticipating that they might be arrested and exiled and possibly never return to their families again.

their poorer brethren, but did not revert to working the land in common or pooling of herds. Even within villages there were disagreements, and this caused a number of Doukhobor families to join the ranks of the Small Party. More of these splits were to take place when the Doukhobors moved to Canada seven years later.

For his second directive, Verigin asked his followers to forego smoking, drinking, and meat-eating as a purification of the body and as a declaration against violence to animals. The effective date for this action was set for November 4, 1894, on the Festival of Michael the Archangel. While smoking and drinking had already come under the disapproval of Lukeria Kalmykova during the last years of her leadership, the ban on meat-eating met with some opposition from the Doukhobors in the Wet Mountains where the harsh climate and pastoral habits dictated the use of large quantities of meat. The result was a break-away group of 300 families who formed a middle group; the hardcore Verigin followers were called the Fasters, while the meat-eating dissidents led by Alyosha Vorobyov were called the *Myasniki* – (meat-eaters).

The third directive called for abstention from sexual intercourse during the time of tribulation. Most people followed this directive as evidenced by the fact that when

7500 Doukhobors reached Canada in 1899, there were few infants among them. Once in Canada, marriage and childbirth returned to normal incidence, even exceeding the average.

The fourth and most important directive was delivered in the fall of 1894. Verigin began to preach in anarchistic terms dear to Tolstoy the evils of government and the necessity to replace its rule by a Christian communist utopia. He repudiated the compromise made by Lukeria during the war of 1877-78, when the Doukhobors participated in noncombatant service. He now called on his followers to repudiate the oath of allegiance demanded by the new Tsar Nicholas II. Verigin argued that swearing or taking the oath is contrary to the spirit of Jesus; it commits one to kill. But most of all, he called for the rejection of military service, and the return of arms and uniforms by those who were already in the army. Killing, he argued, is contrary to the law of love. To kill God's creatures is wrong. His wholesale repudiation of collective murder was carried out in a two-part strategy, culminating as we have seen with the Burning of Firearms on June 29, 1895.

One consequence of this non-violence directive and the earlier one of communism, was an open resistance to

the tsarist government. Members of the Large Party refused to pay taxes, because they considered it to be the economic root of the military system. No conscripted money, no wars. They also refused to participate in a government plan for Village Prudential Funds, which was envisaged as a reserve for use in time of scarcity; the Doukhobors argued that their own Orphan's Home served this purpose as a mutual aid society.

To tsarist officials, the Doukhobor compliance with these directives from their leader, was diametrically opposed to their notion of a strong autocratic government, whereby its citizens were called up to support it by taking the oath. Some months after the June 29th Burning of Firearms, a public inquiry was held in St. Petersburg, at which several Doukhobors appeared. One investigator said:

Your views are excellent for we would all like wars to cease, and all men to live in harmony, and it may some day come to pass. But the mistake that you Doukhobors have made is that you wished to do

right before other people were ready for you. The time, my friends, has not yet come.

"The time, *Gospodin*, Sir," they replied, "may not yet have come for you, but it has come for us".¹³ The Doukhobors were clearly indicating that, for them, the time to make a determined stand against evil had come, and they were not to be swayed from their deep convictions. In fact the idea was catching on – some Russian Orthodox soldiers were following the example of the Doukhobors in refusing to bear arms. This disease could become epidemic and the authorities knew it.

The government policy was clear. "Cut them off from communication with the outside world as completely as possible, and . . . oblige them to abandon their principles, by the practical threat of slowly exterminating them should they refuse to submit".¹⁴ But tsarist Russia, with all its autocratic power, could not hide the plight of the Doukhobors from the outside, and it was the efforts of Tolstoy and others on the outside that saved the Doukhobors from almost certain extermination.